

## Friday: *Unity*

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 5:27-28 <sup>27</sup> I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. <sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

### Reflect:

Notice how again Paul mentions “all the brothers.” By the way, that is a “gender inclusive term” in the ancient world. This is why some translations will say “brothers and sisters” (e.g., TNIV, NRSV) where others say “brothers.”

Perhaps the reason Paul said “all the brothers” twice in as many verses (vs. 26,27) is because there were some divisions in the body. In a later letter Paul says unity in the body is a gift from God which must be protected (cf. Eph4). If there is disunity in the body – who is at fault?

By having this letter read to “all God’s people” in Thessalonica, Paul is pleading for the unity of the disciples there. It sounds very similar to Jesus praying for the unity of His followers so that the world will believe (cf. Jn17:20-23). In addition to pleading for unity Paul is imploring his readers to conform their lives to what is written in the letter. God is faithful to us (cf. 5:24), but we must be willing to do our part.

**Pray:** Pray for Prairie View Christian Camp; another mission New Life supports. Pray for Bob Griffin and Larry Hayes – elders of New Life. Pray for the Community Group of which you are a part – ask for God’s blessing on the Group and its fellowship. Continue to pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.

### Respond:

Are you willing to make adjustments in your life in order to follow the teachings from this letter? If not, why not? If so – do you have any inklings of what you may need to change?

The phrase “put you under oath” is a legal term. Paul meant business. What stops you from reading through 1 Thessalonians again?

How has God been gracious to you this week?

## Saturday: *Preparation*

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 <sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God... <sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope... <sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord... <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia... and to wait for his Son from heaven... Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

### Reflect:

Saturday is a great day to prepare for Sunday – to begin anticipating corporate worship and the wonder of being in God’s presence with other believers. We plan our trips to get groceries, go on vacation, take in a ball game, etc. Worship deserves so much more attention than most of us give it.

All churches have a reputation in their community. Even smaller, lesser known churches have a reputation – automatically if and when it is known who in the community worships there. The Thessalonians were known for their work, labor, and endurance. They were models of turning, serving, and waiting.

God is looking for model churches; people (not buildings) in whom He is visible. The world is looking for communities of authentic, hopeful, and involved people. What God is looking for, the world needs. Our purpose statement fills this need (e.g., “good works”) – but that is merely on paper (or a PC screen). Fortunately we can provide it – and have been working to do so for quite some time now.

**Pray:** Pray for the National Missionary Convention; a mission New Life supports. Pray for Ed Asbury, Keith Krause, and Mike Haag – deacons at New Life. Pray those the Holy Spirit is prompting to come to New Life tomorrow will be obedient and come. Pray our worship service tomorrow will be pleasing to God.

### Respond:

How might you be better prepared to “come into” God’s presence and honor Him with your worship tomorrow?

How do people perceive of New Life in Emporia and the surrounding communities? How do you contribute to that perception?

# “How?” and “Why?”

September 6 – 12

Our Community Groups are now in full swing. For those of us involved in them we know the area of focus for the initial eight weeks (OK, nine – but with a one week break at the end of September) is “How to Study the Bible.”

I realize that topic may not sound very interesting for some people in the world. It is unfortunate (scandalous?) how haphazardly the Bible is treated by many (some parts of the world cannot get enough copies – It is a precious resource). If “How to Study the Bible” does not sound very interesting for some in the world, perhaps that is because all the “how” in the world is useless without a “why.”

How about these statements for a “why”

- “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” (i.e., if it were not for Christians I would be a Christ-follower)
  - Mahatma Ghandi (“Father of the Nation” of India)
- “I might believe in the Redeemer if His followers looked more Redeemed.”
  - Allegedly said by Friedrich Nietzsche (19<sup>th</sup> century German atheist).
- “I would have met Jesus sooner if not for Christians who led double lives.”
  - Keith Green (converted rock singer, 1970s)

I realize those statements, while based on reality, are also (pointed) excuses. Stated another way, some people will look for any and all reasons to not submit their life to a loving God Who knows better than they do. Yet caught up in the reality of some people looking for an “excuse” is the equally true (and painful) reality that we (i.e., Christians) often give them more than enough excuses to keep them far from God. In other words our lives do not imitate Jesus’ because we do not look “redeemed” due to “double lives.”

So far this year, through the Sunday morning sermons, we have asked “What is Truth?” – during which we heard sermons based on information from The Truth Project. Next we asked “Whose Values?” as we looked at the Core Values of New Life – beliefs that shape what we do. Most recently we asked “Encountering Whom?” as we looked at the benefits of encountering God versus encountering the world.

However...no matter how much “Truth” we learned...no matter how true our “Core Values” are...no matter how wonderful it is to “Encounter God” instead of the world... if we do not intentionally conform our lives to the Bible we will continue to give others all the excuses they want to not enter into a covenant relationship with God.

So how does this fit into a “why” for Bible study? If the Bible is true (and it is), what it says matters (and it does). This week we begin to look at 1 Thessalonians; it is a fascinating letter. In this brief letter the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus is referred to over and over again. In case you did not know, much debate circles around one passage in particular (but we will get to that later), but let’s not lose the message amongst the (unfortunate) confusion. Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming should impact “how” we live now. That ought to be enough “why” for us. At least it was for Paul...

### Monday: Dear...

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

**Reflect:**

Do you remember writing letters as a kid? Quite possibly it started like, “Dear Grandma: How are you doing? I am fine.” Taking the time to write a letter indicates the recipient is cared for by the sender. It also implies information needs communicated.

In the beginning of this letter it seems as if Paul is telling his recipients that both they (us), and he, are doing wonderfully. The church is “in” God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we need to take a step back and remember to Whom it is we belong. If we are truly “in” God and Jesus – “grace” and “peace” are ours. It has been said grace is the source of all real blessings and peace their end issue.

When you read “church” please do not make the mistake of thinking “building.” The word for “church” (*ekklesia*) has its roots in the Old Testament (the LXX – Septuagint) and it means the assembly of God’s people (e.g., Deut9:10 cf. Exod19:4-6). This historical basis as God’s people will become very important as the letter of 1 Thessalonians progresses.

**Respond:**

If you have not yet done so, read through all of 1 Thessalonians in one sitting. Enjoy what you hear...

Do you have more excitement (hopefully at least the same) when you read God’s Word as when you read letter(s) from a certain someone in your life?

Do you know who Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy are? How can you find out about them?

**Pray:** Pray for the CEA; a Kansas church planting organization New Life supports. Thank God for the privilege of worshipping Him yesterday – pray His Spirit impresses the encouragement and convictions from yesterday’s service on your heart. Ask God for a desire to know and apply His Word in your life. Continue to pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).

### Tuesday: Comfort (and Challenge)

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 <sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

**Reflect:**

What words of comfort. For all that can be said about the opening and closing of 1 Thessalonians (i.e., 1:1; 5:23-28), Paul intended to comfort those who read this letter. Verse 24 is so instructive for us – God is faithful. He is the covenant keeping God. We are the ones who (unfortunately) do not consistently hold up our end of the deal.

Yet simply because God is faithful, and we struggle with our commitment to Him, does not mean we have nothing to do on our end. If that were so – then why would Paul have written the letter in the first place...and why are you wasting your time reading what I have written?

It is interesting to note these verses are very similar to an earlier prayer wish of Paul’s (cf. 1Thess3:13). As we continue to look at 1 Thessalonians we will see Paul was very concerned about living a holy life (cf. a Core Value of ours – “Sanctifying the Saints”). Some take the mention of “spirit...soul...body” to mean Paul views us as some sort of “three-part being” (i.e., trichotomy). Yet is that Paul’s intention?

**Respond:**

How has God been faithful to you this week? Have you told anyone about it?

How can you respond appropriately to God’s faithfulness toward you – today?

How do you sense a “peace” from God (which is an “end” – i.e., outcome/result – of His grace)?

**Pray:** Pray for Lincoln Christian Seminary, Manhattan Christian College, and Ozark Christian College; missions supported by New Life. Pray for the Unity and Purity of New Life. Ask God to help you be faithful to Him – expect a “positive” reply. Continue to pray for God’s people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).

### Wednesday: A.I.M.

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 <sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

**Reflect:**

This week the focus in our Community Groups is A.I.M. (i.e., Author’s Intended Meaning). In light of that we ought to let Paul’s intention speak for itself in v23 (cf. the question from yesterday).

If Paul is teaching we are a “three-part being” here...is he at odds with Jesus (cf. Mk12:29-30)? Personally I’d rather “side” with Jesus – which would mean we are a “four-part being.” Yet doing this is silly and pitting the Bible against itself...

Paul means our entire lives are to be sanctified. The word Paul used for “blameless” is a word used of morals. In coming weeks we will see Paul is very concerned about proper sexual conduct (cf. 1Thess4) – a “sticky issue” in our day and age – as it was in Thessalonica when Paul wrote this letter (more to come in following weeks). Regardless of whether or not you agree with me (I believe we are a unified being; our bodies merely experience separation from our soul at death due to our fallen world), you cannot deny the basis for Paul’s charge to the Thessalonians is the return of Jesus.

**Respond:**

Do you think Paul intended to spark a theological debate with verse 23?

When you read 1 Thessalonians earlier – where else did the concept of “blameless” appear?

What is an area of your life in need of “sanctification?”

**Pray:** Pray for Shiloh Home of Hope and Emporia Christian Schools; two missions New Life supports. Pray for God to show you an area of your life in need of sanctification. Confess to God your need for His help in your sanctification – expect His help in return. Continue to pray for God’s Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).

### Thursday: Relationships

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 5:25-26 <sup>25</sup> Brothers, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

**Reflect:**

Although I like the name for them, i.e. “Community Groups,” I sometimes fear we did ourselves a disservice with that label. Quite often we (those in “the church” – not just at New Life) do not take the pursuit of true community seriously. I would hate for a label to undercut a genuine pursuit of the real thing...

What do I mean by that? Real community takes work. It is hard. Yet it is so worth it. (Laying aside how true/authentic community means if someone loses a job others pick up the slack – even when it means sacrificing in big ways...) The reality is that we are “family” in the church.

An old saying goes, “you can’t choose your family, but you can choose your friends.” The same is true in the church. We are family, and families have relational struggles. Any relationship does, it is a part of life – a given. The variable is, “How will you handle relational struggles in the church?” If you run from them you will stunt (perhaps even stop) your spiritual growth. Jesus commands us to seek out those with whom we may have difficulties and talk (Mt18:15ff). Will we obey?

**Respond:**

Do you have a strained relationship with another Christian? What are you going to do about it?

What can you do to promote a growing sense of “community” at New Life?

**Pray:** Pray for Cookson Hills (a Christian Children’s home); a mission New Life supports. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to restore any strained relationships you may have. Pray for Brent McCrory – the preaching minister at New Life. Continue to pray for open doors to share God’s Word (Col4:2-6) and the boldness to do so.